

HANG 10—OR 20!

A bag lady passes on her Purse Gene.

I'M ADDICTED TO BAGS. I CAN ALWAYS find a reason to buy a purse or a backpack or a tote or a rucksack. I've also developed the habit of buying a bag when I travel. **I like to say the reason is practical.** I rationalize that I need something to hold my souvenirs, but that's far from the truth. My luggage always contains an empty duffel for that purpose.

A bag appeals to me as a travel memento because it combines function with fantasy. At home, I may be running late to meet someone, but with my Turkish bag made from old rugs slung over my shoulder, I'm sauntering through an Istanbul market.

I used to hang my bags from nails in my closet, but eventually there wasn't enough space. During one of my perennial office reorganizations, I decided to incorporate them as a design element. While looking at bunk beds at Ikea one day, I came across a coat rack that would make the perfect display stand for my handbags. It was tall, dark and metallic with hooks, each of which could hold more than one bag, all along its length.

Now, when I sit at my desk, I look at my bags, which evoke memories. There's the canvas bag from Bode's General Store in Abiquiu, New Mexico, where my family always stopped for a snack on the two-hour drive from my hometown to my grandmother's house. I still get a Coke there when I'm in the area.

A hand-embroidered leather backpack purchased in a hole-in-the-wall shop in the Indian fort town of Jaisalmer is a reminder of a three-day camel safari my husband and I and three Belgians took in the Rajasthan desert, while the small backpack the color of the pine trees at Lake Tahoe held the treasures my daughter gathered along that lake's shore.

There's the cotton tote, which is the souvenir of a last-minute trip to the Baltics my husband and I took more than 15 years ago. On a bitterly windy February day, we punctuated our walk around Tallin's medieval town with visits to shops to get out of the cold. We popped into a gallery to get warm, but the artwork intrigued us and we ended up staying for more than an hour, leaving the Estonian capital with a bag instead of a painting.

Several hooks hold what I refer to as my **Slavic Collection**, accumulated during several extended stays in Russia and Poland. I've got an olive-green oiled-cotton rucksack that I bought at a department store in Krasnodar during a Russian summer language study program. A rectangular black leather "man bag," perfect for carrying notebooks and pens, is from a hunting store in Warsaw I wandered into by mistake. A warm summer afternoon spent in the cafes and shops of Krakow's Market Square yielded a leather tote big enough to hold a laptop, several books,

folders and some groceries.

While I'm the type who's always favored a bag as large as possible, I do have one small one. It only holds a few folded bills and a couple keys. I bought it on a snowy evening near Christmas in the Polish mountain town of Zakopane, its hand-tooled flowers on the leather flap catching my eye as I walked along a street.

I tell myself that my love affair with bags is genetic. I'm the daughter of a woman who continues her quest for the Perfect Bag.

I tell myself that my love affair with bags is genetic. After all, I'm the daughter of a woman who continues her Quest for the Perfect Bag. My own daughter, Sarah, has inherited the gene, too.

During a vacation in Paris last spring, we happened to enter a store through the accessories department.

"I think I'll buy myself a bag," I said.

"I think I will, too!" my daughter said.

A half hour later, we emerged with our new bags. Mine was chocolate-brown nylon with leather trim; Sarah's was bright yellow patent leather, her first, I'm sure, of many bag purchases to come.

-Margaret Foley

